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BOOK REVIEWS.

ESSAYS ON THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY AND ON THE PRIVATE AND POLITICAL RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF MANKIND. By Jonathan Dymond. Ninth edition. Dublin: Eason & Son, Limited, 1894. Pp. xiv., 294.

This book, though perhaps not much known in philosophical circles, seems to have a very wide circulation, and is of real interest to the serious student of practical ethics and of the history of ethical ideas, because it represents one of the few attempts, outside the Catholic Church, to work out a *system* of strictly *Christian* ethics. The author was a linen-draper of Exeter (England), who died in 1828, at the age of thirty-two. His family belonged to the Society of Friends. The "Essays on Morality" were published in 1829, after his death, and were made the occasion of an elaborate criticism by the poet Southey in the *Quarterly Review* for January, 1831. Southey accepts Dymond's disregard of metaphysics; he accepts his rejection of utilitarian ethics; like him he makes the ultimate standard of right and wrong to be the "Will of God" revealed in the Bible. In the application of this standard there are naturally considerable differences between the Anglican Tory, imbued to the full with the spirit of reaction, and an hereditary Quaker whose political sympathies had much in common with the more moderate "Radicals" of his day. The agreements and disagreements are curious and instructive. Southey fully approves Dymond's doctrine of non-resistance to governments,—*passive* obedience,—"the old and true doctrine of the Church of England;" but for Dymond's very modest and temperate criticism of the unreformed British constitution he has not much toleration, nor for his objections to the punishment of death, war, and established churches.

Dymond, as has been said, makes the revealed Will of God the supreme and ultimate rule of morals, but he attempts no proof that the Christian Scriptures contain the most perfect and completest expression of that Divine Will. His position is one which might be taken with equal reasonableness by a Mohammedan who accepts the Koran as the final revelation. It is not logically open to Dymond to argue from the superior moral excellence of Christian ethics, for such an argument assumes that we have a standard of right and wrong by which to judge Scripture, and therefore makes

Scripture no longer the supreme rule in morals. The authority of the "Law of Nature" and of "Utility" he holds to be subordinate to that of the "Moral Law," by which he means the moral precepts of the New Testament. He does indeed speak of "an immediate communication of the will of God," not limited to the writers of the New Testament nor to the Christian, but this "immediate communication," he says, "is little adapted to the formation of external rules," so that he evidently regards Scripture as the only certain source of moral rules. Unlike the seventeenth century Puritans, and in frequently expressed disagreement with Milton, he refuses to accept the Old Testament as of equal authority with the New Testament, even when not expressly put aside by the latter. But within the New Testament he draws no distinction between the "counsels of perfection" of the Sermon on the Mount and that adaptation of Christian principles to the needs of an organized community living in the ordinary world which we find already in the Pauline Epistles. On many matters, *e.g.*, as to oaths, Dymond, like all Quakers, accepts the precepts of the Gospel as absolutely binding. But though he condemns all wars without exception on the supposed authority of the New Testament and irrespective of any considerations of expediency, he does not, like Count Tolstoi, propose to apply rigidly the principle of "not resisting evil" in cases where injuries have been done by individuals to one another within the state. On the contrary, he proposes to treat many acts as crimes, to be punished by imprisonment, which are at present only regarded as civil wrongs; he even allows distraint for rent against unprincipled tenants; and proposes severe measures against fraudulent debtors. "Who would admit a footpad to his table? And who would admit to his table a man who was just like a footpad?"—a healthy sentiment, doubtless; but is it more consistent with the principle of "loving our enemies" than is a rebellion against intolerable tyranny or a war undertaken to put down misgovernment and oppression? The precepts about taking no thought for the morrow and about letting the thief who takes your coat take your cloak also have, fortunately for the Quakers and for the world, never been construed very literally by the Quaker community.

Punishment is said by Dymond to have only three proper ends: (1) Reformation of the offender; (2) Example; (3) Restitution or compensation to the injured. The primary object of punishment—the safety of the community—does not seem to be considered at all, except in so far as it comes under the second of these

heads. It is difficult to see how, if we allow punishments of individuals by the state (punishments which, however mild, necessarily involve some use of force by the state), it is *always* wrong in the state to use force to protect its members against attack from without. The unpractical Tolstoi is a consistent representative of Oriental religious anarchy, while the Quakers as good business men have understood the more obvious requirements of civil order. They have been a useful leaven in communities that have always possessed enough of the fighting spirit to be able to tolerate with safety and advantage a small body of protesters for peace. To the modern and moderate form of Quakerism, which is admirably represented in this book, belongs in a special manner the distinction of treating religion as primarily ethical. Ceremonies are of course conspicuously put aside, but theological orthodoxy is not allowed, as too often in other religious bodies, to usurp the place of right conduct in the ordinary affairs of life. In Dymond's book the *distinctive* creed of Christianity is only referred to in the concluding words. But it is clear enough that the attempt to derive a detailed working code of ethics from scattered "texts" of the New Testament leads at times to casuistry of a questionable sort in the hands of the Quaker as much as in the hands of the Roman Catholic theologian. And the Catholic has the enormous advantage of making the distinction between counsels of perfection for the few and commands binding on all.

A consideration of Dymond's book suggests two questions as well worth the study of ethical students: (1) What do we mean when we use the phrase "Christian ethics"? Are we thinking of the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount? or are we thinking of the whole of the New Testament? or of the whole Bible? and of the Bible as interpreted and glossed by the Catholic Church, or by any body of Protestants, or by the individual who is using the word "Christian"? or do we mean to use "Christian" in an objective, historical sense, for what is prevalent among peoples that profess Christianity, as others profess Buddhism or Mohammedanism? (2) What have been the special contributions made to practical ethics by different religious bodies? We should hope to find that, amid much of misdirected energy and zeal, something of value was due to all that had ever moulded for any length of time the lives of their members.

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